

An African ... Palaver...

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An African Palaver

By GRACE JUNE JONES

INTRODUCTION

Before opening our Palaver, for the benefit of those who may not understand, let me explain its meaning. In Africa, although the towns do not govern themselves independently, yet each is allowed its Palaver, or "talking place." This consists of a wooden platform, elevated a few feet from the ground, generally erected under the shelter of a widespreading tree, called the palaver tree. There the people gather when necessary to "discuss important questions, to settle cases of dispute, or to pass judgment upon criminals." **Leader**

Our Palaver meets to-day under no spreading tree, no criminal waits upon our sentence, nor trembles at our gathering; yet our session is no less important, as we shall consider for a few moments what has been and must be done for Africa—that land whose very name echoes of death and darkness—before

the kingdom of the Lord of Hosts shall be established in its borders. Will the members of the Palaver kindly come to the platform.

Leader (To members seated in low chairs around her.)

I have called you together this afternoon, that we might have, as the Africans say, a "big talk" concerning the progress of "the kingdom" in the Dark Continent. There are many discouragements, we know, for "from the beginning of the Christian Era Africa has been a battleground, where in some respects Christianity has had its hardest fight," but there are blessed encouragements too. Let us have both the lights and shadows in our Palaver.

First Speaker Since you summoned us here I have been studying the map of Africa, and its shape has impressed me strongly. Will you please look at it for a moment while I pin (or hold) it here. Truly, it seems to be a "great listening ear," hearkening as if in suspense to the verdict which shall fall from the lips of Christendom as to its future; or, viewed in another way, it seems a "gigantic interrogation point," a continual challenge to all of us who bear the name of the "quiet King," who in his infancy was hidden away in this land. Shall that ear listen in vain because we, the Christian girls of America, will not

carry or send the word for which it waits ; or shall that question tremble down the centuries unanswered because we, to whom Christ bequeathed the message, are too indifferent or afraid to pass it on?

Yes, and I've been thinking in what isolation Africa is wrapped. Visitors who make the tour of our mission fields can cheer the other missionaries, but none of them venture into Africa. No, Dr. Mabie, Dr. Barbour, Mrs. Safford, Mrs. Banes, and others have carried sunshine into many of our mission stations, but poor Africa must be passed by. The continent hangs there (pointing to the map) silent and alone, and yet as we look and listen there comes a great murmur of appeal for help from its jungles and waste places. We must do more for Africa.

**Second
Speaker**

In spite of this I have a big discouragement to bring. Ever since this Palaver has been called I have felt most strongly that we are carrying on our work in Africa at too great a cost. The name of Africa, even, makes me shudder. You know it has been called "the white man's grave." Of more than seven hundred explorers who have toiled in Africa, at least five hundred and fifty have died within its borders. "For missionaries it

**Third
Speaker**

has been pre-eminently a land of death." Truly there "pestilence walketh in darkness, and destruction wasteth at noonday." It makes my blood curdle to read of the dreadful fate of many who have met martyrdom in that land. Think of the hundreds that have died with the fever and other deadly African diseases. Surely it would be wiser to devote our money and energy to other fields. I think the price of Africa is too costly.

Fourth Speaker Ah, but you forget that the great commission embraces all countries. "All the world" includes Africa as truly as America. We must not be too easily daunted. Remember the words of Christ, "He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." If the price is great, the reward is infinitely greater.

Fifth Speaker Yes, indeed, and the darker the country, the greater the need, the more ready and abundant should be our response. Close your eyes a moment and let this great silhouette of darkness rise before you,—"Africa, favored as the training ground of the Jewish people before they were permitted to enter the land of Canaan; Africa, chosen by God as an asylum for his own Son; Africa, permitted through Simon, the Cyrenean, to share with Christ the burden of the cross; Africa, bathed in the blood of the early martyrs—surely this Africa stretches out her hands unto God."

You are right, and I was wrong. I see it now. The price is great, but we must obey the Saviour's commission. Henceforth, I will pray more and give more for the evangelization of this "uttermost part of the earth" for which Christ shed his blood.

**Third
Speaker**

I think we all agree that our motto for the future must be more, not less, for Africa. "The Church of Jesus Christ is but beginning to put forth her might for the redemption of Africa, but already the work being carried on in that Dark Continent should silence any doubting Thomas who objects to further investment of life and treasure." It would be a fatal error to abandon the work now. Some of the terrible problems which confronted our missionaries a few years ago are being solved. Take, for instance, the slave trade. One writer states that it has been outlawed and practically abolished, though some of our missionaries say that this is truer in theory than practice. Yet it is a blessed fact that "where the Zanzibar slave market stood is the cathedral of the University Mission and the communion table is over the very spot where once stood the old whipping-post."

Reader

How a fact like that thrills one's heart! Only yesterday I was reading of that consecrated pioneer, David Livingstone, in whose

**Fourth
Speaker**

epitaph in Westminster Abbey it is written :
"For thirty years his life was spent in an unwearied effort to evangelize the native races, to explore the undiscovered secrets, to abolish the desolating slave trade of Central Africa, where with his last words he wrote, 'All I can add in my solitude is, may Heaven's rich blessing come down on everyone, American, English or Turk, who will help to heal this open sore of the world !' "

Leader Yes, and don't you remember the lines which appeared in *Punch* after his death?

" He needs no epitaph to guard a name
Which man shall prize while worthy work is known;
He lived and died for good—be this his fame:
Let marble crumble, this is Living-stone."

Sixth Speaker One difficulty which our missionaries find hard to overcome is the widespread belief in witchcraft. When a person is sick or dies it is believed that someone has bewitched him; therefore, to discover the witch is the all-important thing. To aid in this a witch doctor is summoned, who, after various incantations, by means of which he works himself into a state of frenzy, accuses someone in the crowd of being the witch. The accused is seized and subjected to fearful forms of torture to induce him to confess. One favorite method, in sections of the

country where large ants are found, is to smear the body of the supposed witch with grease and securely bind him to one of the large anthills. It is needless to say that the bites of the ants cause excruciating pain. If he still disowns his guilt, he is killed for his obstinacy. The chiefs are wise enough to play upon this popular belief in ridding themselves of those they fear or dislike.

Can we doubt the genuineness of the appeal by the wife of one of our missionaries in Africa: "O America, with your churches, with your Bibles, with your knowledge of a Saviour's love, help your brothers and sisters of Africa, that they, too, may know him. Are there not many more to give, to pray, to go, that the Redeemer's Kingdom may be established in that dark land; that she now touched by the first rays may be bathed in the full light of the Sun of Righteousness, and healed of all her diseases by the healing on his wings!"

"I know of a land that is sunk in shame,
Of hearts that faint and tire;
And I know of a name, a name, a name
Can set this land on fire.
Its sound is a brand, its letters flame;
I know of a name, a name, a name
Will set this land on fire."

**Fifth
Speaker**

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, **Leader**
will draw all men unto me."

**Seventh
Speaker** We mustn't forget amid the blackness the signs of the dawning day in Africa. Three hundred and forty-seven Protestant missionaries are laboring there, assisted by over four thousand ordained and unordained native helpers. Churches and Sunday schools, colleges and training schools, are sending forth great waves of influence. "Languages have been reduced to written form, and in some instances written languages have been literally created by the missionaries. The patient, thorough work of the missionaries in reducing the native languages to written form made possible the translation of the Bible into the chief languages and dialects of Africa, and have thus enabled the missionaries to sow the seed broadcast over the continent."

**Eighth
Speaker** Our own Dr. Clark, from Ikoko, writes of the good work which is being carried on among the young people of his region. He tells of one girl, Amba Bonkania, a daughter of one of the chiefs of Ikoko, who came to the school promising to remain six years. She was full of superstition and sin when she came, knew nothing of God and his love, was ignorant in every respect. In her presence men and women have been cruelly tied, killed, and eaten to honor the funeral of some great man. Others she has seen speared and hung for witchcraft. Now she

can read fluently, and tell to her own people the story of the wonderful love that saved her. A few months ago she was buried with Christ in baptism. How dare we say in the light of one such redemption, even, that African missions, at whatever price, are not worth the cost?

"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me."

**First
Speaker**

The time has come to close our little Palaver. Let us remember the needs of this sin-sick land, and pray and work for Africa as never before. The day is breaking, but the clouds are still heavy. Shall we not do all we can to "make the shadows disappear"? Over the Congo floats the Free State flag; to-day we have mingled with its folds the flag which we all love so dearly, the "star spangled banner," but let us pray that soon over all countries, from the rising of the sun even to the setting, may float the central standard,—the Christian banner.

Leader

"Till from sea to sea
Shall the tidings be
That Christ the Lord is King."

All rise and sing : "Fling out the Banner."

Tune: "Doane."

"Fling out the banner! Let it float
Skyward and seaward, high and wide;
The sun shall light its shining folds,
The cross on which the Saviour died.

"Fling out the banner ; heathen lands
Shall see from far the glorious sight,
And nations, gathering at the call,
Their spirits kindle in its light.

"Fling out the banner ! Let it float,
Skyward and seaward, high and wide ;
Our glory only in the cross,
Our only hope the Crucified."

*(This hymn is found in "Missionary Hymns."
Price, 5 cents per copy.)*

NOTE.—This exercise calls for the use of the set of flags obtainable from the Woman's Baptist Foreign Missionary Society, Tremont Temple, Boston, Mass., and also from Room 808, 1420 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, Pa. Decorate the platform with the flags, arranging in the centre the United States, Belgium, the flag that floats over Africa, and the Christian banner. The first speaker should have a large map of Africa, entirely black save for the few white points where are the mission stations.

